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## CHAPTER VIII

### DEPENDENTS AND DELINQUENTS

Another way in which the migration affected the Negroes may be seen in a brief study of their health in the North. To any people moving into new surroundings health is an extremely important concern, because on it largely depends their success in adjusting themselves to the new situations, especially if hard daily toil is their sole means of subsistence. As regards the health of the Negro migrants in the North it is reported that from the start they became, to a great extent, victims of disease. Such a consequence, however, was inevitable because of the sudden change of the Negroes from the comparatively mild climate of the South to the severe climate of the North, their inadequate clothing for the cold weather of this section, the hardships of the unrelenting toil, and the congested and unsanitary living conditions, in the Northern cities and industrial centers. These forces all operated heavily against the bodies of the Negroes and thus rendered them susceptible to pneumonia, bronchitis, tuberculosis, and other deadly maladies. The following studies of health conditions among Negroes in a few Northern cities will demonstrate the extent to which the newcomers were menaced by disease.

According to accounts given by Mr. Abraham Epstein, the health problem of the Negro migrants in Pittsburgh was a serious concern. An investigation into the causes of Negro mortality, based on comparison between a seven-month period in 1915 and a like period in 1917, showed that pneumonia cases during the latter year had increased 200 per cent over those of the former year. The same period in 1917 indicated also a marked increase in acute bronchitis and meningitis, and almost twice as many deaths from heart disease. The seven-month period in 1917, when the

migration was in operation, registered, moreover, a total Negro death rate of 527, whereas the same period in 1915, before the movement began, showed a death list of only 295. During the first seven months of 1917, furthermore, the death rate among Negroes in this city was 48 per cent greater than the birth rate. In other words, while in the general city population the number of deaths was 30 per cent less than the number of births, the number of deaths among the Negroes greatly exceeded the diminished number of births; "thus for every one hundred persons born in Pittsburgh in 1917, there were 70 deaths, whereas among the Negro population for every one hundred children born, one hundred and forty-eight died."<sup>156</sup>

The report of the Health Department of Newark stated that during the month of December, 1917, there were 975 cases of diseases, and that this number was 287 in excess of the number of cases of sickness reported during the preceding month. These cases were largely bronchial pneumonia, and the deaths resulting from this malady numbered ninety-four. The report attributed the cause of this increase in pneumonia to the severe weather and to the increasing number of Negro laborers from the South, who, unaccustomed to the harsh climate of the North, easily became victims to this disease.<sup>157</sup> In Philadelphia, in the early spring of 1917, the lack of housing accommodations for the Negro influx caused women and children to be stranded in railroad stations overnight; and this soon brought on a public health problem. As was the case in Newark, in this place, too, there was an increase in pneumonia cases due to the sudden rush of Negroes to the North before the cold period was passed.<sup>158</sup>

The health conditions were so serious in Cincinnati that the city health officer suggested the establishment of a community health center in order to improve the health of the Negroes. He pointed out that their general death rate was

<sup>156</sup> Epstein, A., *The Negro Migrant in Pittsburgh*, pp. 56-59.

<sup>157</sup> Pendleton, H. B., *Survey*, 37: 571, Feb. 17, 1917.

<sup>158</sup> *Survey*, 38: 28, April 7, 1917.

about double that of the whites, their pneumonia rates more than three times as high, and their syphilis rate more than five times as high as the whites. In proportion to the population, he affirmed also that three times as many Negro children died before birth as whites, and that three times as many of the babies born alive died before their first birthday anniversary; and that the excess in deaths of Negroes from preventable causes alone was so great that it accounts for more than one point in the general death rate of the city.<sup>159</sup>

This rush of the Negroes to the North, moreover, was accompanied by smallpox and venereal diseases. Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, for example, faced a danger of epidemic from the former and were compelled to undertake wholesale vaccination of laborers in camps and mills. In one year the city of Cleveland also reported 330 cases of this malady. As to venereal diseases these became so rife that some industries adopted the physical examination system as a part of application for work. One large sugar refinery found after three weeks of this experiment that three in every ten Negro applicants had to be rejected because of syphilis or gonorrhea. An examination of 800 Negroes at a large railroad camp showed that 70 per cent of them were infected with tuberculosis, syphilis, or gonorrhea, and that nearly 80 per cent of the total were infected with the latter disease. This, however, was the case for the most part only among the shiftless, the casuals and floaters, for the examinations of the better type of Negroes showed that the percentage of those affected by those diseases was exceedingly small.

The recent movement brought to the cities of the North a multitude of ignorant Negroes mostly from the farms and plantations of the South, where opportunities for education are almost unknown. To the majority of them city life was an entirely new thing, and especially strange to them was the extremely complex life of the large cities of

<sup>159</sup> *Survey*, 42: 579, July 19, 1917.

the North. Theirs, therefore, was an extremely difficult task to adapt themselves to the mores of these places, and in their efforts to do so, it is very obvious that they could not avoid committing errors. Furthermore, there were among these migrants many who, having been freed from the influence of the strict moral and religious checks of the southern communities, lost complete control of themselves, and were thus led into the committing of criminal acts. These circumstances, however, do not warrant the conclusion that with the coming of the Negroes to the North there arose a wave of crime of various kinds. This was not at all the case. The truth of the matter is that there was an increase in certain cities in both minor and major offenses committed by Negroes, but in this regard the increase in minor offenses was far greater than that in major offenses.

What has just been said is well illustrated by the results of an investigation of Negro crime in Pittsburgh. This was done by comparing the police court records for a period of seven months during 1916-17 with those for the same period during 1914-15, before the migration occurred. This comparison showed that the arrests of Negroes for petty offenses during the former period greatly exceeded those of the latter. During 1914-15 the total number of arrests was 1,681, whereas during 1916-17 the total number was 2,998. There was also a disproportionate increase in arrests for such offenses as suspicious characters, disorderly conduct, drunkenness, keeping and visiting disorderly houses, and violations of city ordinances. Increase in arrests for major offenses was very small. In 1914-15 the number of Negroes arrested for grave offenses was 93, while the number arrested for same in 1916-17 was only 94.<sup>160</sup>

The report on Negro crime and delinquency in the city of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, showed that the Negro population had served more than to double the number of prisoners of color during a period of one year ending 1917. During the spring and summer of that year more than half

<sup>160</sup> Epstein, A., *The Negro Migrant in Pittsburgh*, pp. 47-48.

the average number of inmates of the county jail, 200 in all, had been Negroes, although the Negro population of the county was estimated to be about 10 per cent of the total population. Most of the Negroes had been sentenced to serve short terms for stabbing, carrying deadly weapons, or for fighting.<sup>161</sup> Likewise, in Steelton, Pennsylvania, there was much disturbance among the Negroes which manifested itself in the form of fighting and cutting one another. From the first there had been a general carrying of weapons, promiscuous shooting, and dangers of trouble with the white population. Many arrests of Negroes were reported to have been made on the especial charges of drunkenness, gambling and disorderly conduct.<sup>162</sup> The Census of 1920 shows, however, that very few Negroes remained in Harrisburg during this preceding decade as the increase was only 721 or 15.9 per cent.

In Cleveland, Ohio, it was found that the Negro population of the jail had increased from 13 per cent of the total jail population in September, 1916, to 87 per cent in September, 1917. During the month of August of the latter year the Negro population of the jail was 60 per cent of the total jail population. The superintendent of prisons, however, expressed the belief that these Negroes were not of the criminal type, and affirmed that they had been sent to jail for such minor offenses as loafing on street corners, drunkenness, and as suspicious characters. He declared, further, that in many instances, because they were inadequately housed, deprived of opportunities for decent recreation, poorly clad, and often hatless on the streets, Negroes were summarily picked up by the police and sent to prison on the mere charge of suspicion.<sup>163</sup> This accounts for much of the so-called "Negro crime" in the United States.

Without further investigation, and relying solely on the

<sup>161</sup> Tyson, F. D., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., p. 141.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

facts already presented concerning conditions among the migrants in the North, one would, no doubt, at once suppose that a great many Negroes at first failed in the struggle, fell by the wayside, and finally became public charges. Strange as it may seem to relate, however, the contrary was rather the case. Few, indeed, were those among the migrants who became so overwhelmed by poverty as to necessitate their calling for public aid. The only account of Negroes appealing for help is that given by the Society for Organizing Charity in the city of Philadelphia. In this statement we are informed that during one year, ending early in 1917, this society received twenty-eight applications from Negro families who had recently come from the South. This same report states also that the Juvenile Court had received relatively few applications; that the Children's Bureau had not removed any children from newly arrived families; and that the House of Detention had handled only twenty-eight children arrested on one charge or another.<sup>164</sup>

This surprisingly small number of Negroes who became public charges must not, however, convey the impression that the migrants were altogether self-supporting. Numerous instances could be cited in which it would be shown that many of the older Negro residents of the North came to the rescue of stranded migrants from the South. Churches and missions did much to help the newcomers to settle themselves in the new environment. When the Negroes began to come in very large numbers, moreover, and when the public realized the many obstacles which were in the way of their adjustment, numerous uplift organizations or counter-selective agencies sprang up, having as their specific function the assisting of the migrants to adapt themselves to the new conditions. Foremost among these was the National League on Urban Conditions among Negroes. This organization, however, had been in existence for several years, and had been making itself interested in

<sup>164</sup> Bell, J. B., *Proc. Nat. Conf. Soc. Work.*, pp. 502-03, June, 1917.

the welfare of Negro migrants who were flocking to the cities of the North and West before the recent Negro movement. When this exodus was in full operation, this organization greatly expanded its work by establishing branches in most of the cities where the migrants were located. In order to perform its work more effectively it adopted a program which was executed in most of these cities. The program was (1) the establishment of an employment bureau to secure jobs for all newcomers who had no promise of any before their arrival; (2) the opening of a bureau to locate suitable houses at reasonable rates for the migrants; (3) the organization of a department to provide various kinds of wholesome recreation for the newcomers; (4) the maintenance of a department to aid in suppressing and preventing delinquency and crime among the Negro migrants; and (5) the putting forth of systematic efforts to help the Negroes to become industrially efficient. Thus, it can readily be seen that this organization and the smaller uplift agencies played a large part in the adjustment of the Negroes to the Northern environment; and it is no doubt due largely to their efforts that so very few of the migrants became objects of public charity.

Very recent inquiries, however, show that in certain centers large numbers of the Negro migrants are in distress and are, therefore, compelled to seek public relief. These are single men and in many cases men with families who have been deprived of work because of the great industrial depression now in existence for nearly a year. They are moving from the industrial centers where they were formerly employed into the larger cities either in search of work or on their way back to their homes in the South. Usually, in these places they become stranded and are thus forced to seek aid. Conditions due to the influx of Negro families into the city of Pittsburgh are described by Mr. Charles C. Cooper, head of the Kingsley House, as follows: "The great number of idle colored men and women in any part of the great cities is difficult to estimate; there is no method



of computing those who have come into the city after being laid off in surrounding territory. During some twelve days in January, 1921, 2,100 colored men, who had come from surrounding districts, and none of whom had been working in Pittsburgh, applied at the little Providence Rescue Mission in Pittsburgh for assistance and work. In one week 1,027 applied to the Urban League of this City for work, and 8 received it." He states, further, that the usual uplift or philanthropic agencies were overburdened in their efforts to help these unfortunates. Two prominent Negro churches volunteered their services and rendered valuable assistance to the regular relief organizations in the matter of feeding and housing these migrants. The situation, moreover, was all the more aggravated because of the attitude of the police department toward these newcomers and the acute housing conditions. With its usual lack of understanding, it permitted the police officers to arrest hundreds of these Negroes, many of whom were sent to the workhouse. On account of the scarcity of dwelling places rents were very high, and even where money was available for the purpose, the purchasing of houses was an impossibility. When a large group of these distressed men were asked if they were going to return to the South on account of their misfortunes they firmly replied: "Like Hell we are!"<sup>165</sup>

A small movement of some unemployed Negroes endeavoring to reach their original homes in the South, however, greatly augmented the number of homeless Negroes in the city of Louisville, Kentucky, during December, 1920. As this city has never made provision to care for homeless men, these wanderers at first received a very cold reception. The workhouse became the lodging-place of a large number of them, because they were arbitrarily arrested by the police, and on the charge of vagrancy were sentenced by the court to this institution for a period of ninety days. Efforts of the State Employment Bureau and the local branch of the Urban League to find jobs for these men were

<sup>165</sup> *Survey*, 45: 752, Feb. 26, 1921, "A New Negro Migration."

of no avail. Finally, through the instrumentality of the Community Council of this city a meeting of representatives of a number of organizations devised a plan of action for the purpose of aiding these homeless men. To supply them with sleeping quarters the Young Men's Christian Association furnished the use of its basement wherein thirty beds with bedding, loaned by the Associated Charities, were placed. Blankets were provided by the Salvation Army Industrial Home. Funds to defray the expenses of a night man and for breakfasts for the men were pledged by the Urban League and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The Director of the Board of Public Safety promised the cooperation of the police by requesting the latter to refer homeless men to the Young Men's Christian Association instead of arresting them with the view of having them sent to the workhouse. The Associated Charities agreed to see to it that every man who actually could be taken care of in another community would be given the necessary transportation, and the city promised to assist in meeting this item of expense. In the meantime the State Employment Bureau and the Urban League gave assurance that they would renew their efforts to secure jobs for those in need of work.<sup>166</sup>

The extent to which these conditions exist is not yet definitely known; but owing to unemployment there are many more cases of Negroes undergoing hardships such as those to which reference has just been made. Mr. E. K. Jones, the Executive Secretary of the National Urban League, states that in the city of Detroit a very large number of Negroes are unemployed and in consequence have had to appeal to the city for relief. He is of the opinion that proportionally the Negroes are receiving more aid than any other group, for while they constitute a small percentage of the population of the city, they receive 37 per cent of the total relief given. In Chicago and its vicinity, owing to decreased production, not long ago, 70,000 Ne-

<sup>166</sup> Hoyer, R. A., "Migration of Colored Workers," *Survey*, 45: 930, March 26, 1921.

gro laborers agreed to accept a cut in wages rather than lose their jobs. The agreement was that they would accept a 10 per cent reduction in wages for unskilled laborers and a 15 per cent reduction for skilled workers. Mr. Parker, President of the American Unity Labor Union, declared then that there were 100,000 unemployed men in Chicago and its environs.<sup>167</sup> Thus here too a large number of Negroes are undoubtedly undergoing some hardships or are being placed in positions where these will certainly overtake them.

The fact that so many Negroes are out of work and on this account have fallen into poverty raises the question as to whether their unemployment is due to a general policy of employers to deprive Negroes of work simply because of their color. It is known that during this industrial depression production is exceedingly small and that correspondingly there is an infinitely small demand for the very large available supply of labor. The result is that there is an almost universal state of unemployment which presumably affects all groups alike. However, Mr. Charles C. Cooper, head of the Kingsley House in Pittsburgh, does not think that this is the case, for he is of the opinion that discrimination has been made against Negro workers. He holds that unskilled Negroes, the latest to be employed in industrial plants, have been among the first to be discharged and that only in exceptional instances is this untrue. These exceptions exist where the percentage of Negroes discharged is no larger than that of white workers because of the efforts of Negro social workers who were employed to act as spokesmen for the Negro laborers.<sup>168</sup> Opposed to this is the view of the Executive Secretary of the National Urban League. He does not believe that the percentage of Negroes discharged from work is larger than that of whites. In many plants, where Negroes have made good, when the necessity of cutting down the labor force arose, the proportion of Negroes who were dropped was no

<sup>167</sup> *New York Times*, Dec. 12, 1920, 14: 1.

<sup>168</sup> *Survey*, 45: 752, Feb. 26, 1921.

greater than that of any other group. In fact, in a few cases, employers have actually retained, proportionally, more Negro than white laborers. Be that as it may, the fact, nevertheless, is that unemployment is largely responsible for the distressed conditions of many of the Negro migrants; and the hope is that when this industrial crisis is passed and they are again given the opportunity to work, they will lift themselves once more to the level of self-help and independence.

In any migration of peoples in modern times there are usually those who either intend to remain in the new locality temporarily or who, because of the least dissatisfaction with conditions, are willing to return home at the earliest possible time. This gives rise to an outflow as well as an inflow of migrants. Perhaps the immigration from Europe to this country may illustrate this. For several years previous to the Great War, while thousands of immigrants arrived in this country, on the one hand, on the other, thousands departed for their respective native lands.<sup>170</sup> To some extent this principle likewise applies to this intra-State movement of the Negro population. From our study of conditions among the migrants in the North it is obvious that many of them found conditions very different from what they had been represented to be by labor agents and others. This undoubtedly brought on much dissatisfaction and disappointment, and thus caused many to seek their way back to the South. The number of those acting thus is very uncertain, because no accurate study in this regard has been made. Nevertheless, some have estimated that only about 10 per cent of the total number of those who left the South returned there; others have estimated it as high as 30 per cent.<sup>171</sup> Both of these percentages, however, are mere guesses, with the likelihood perhaps of the former being approximately nearer the truth.

<sup>169</sup> Washington, F. B., *Survey*, 38: 333-35, July 14, 1917.

<sup>170</sup> Fairchild, H. P., *Immigration*, pp. 348-52.

<sup>171</sup> Dillard, J. H., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., p. 11.

The only attempt which has been made to investigate this phase of the movement was that on the part of the Chicago branch of the National League on Urban Conditions among Negroes shortly after the Washington and Chicago riots in July, 1919. This study was made mainly to verify the reports to the effect that because of these outbreaks the Negroes had become terrified and were on the move back to the South. This investigation was very limited in that it took cognizance of conditions as they pertained to Chicago only. The method of procedure was the study of Negro arrivals and departures during the week following the riot in that city. The interesting result was that during that period 261 Negroes arrived in the city while 219 departed. Of those leaving 83 gave some southern State as their destination. They were for the most part persons returning from vacations, visiting the South, going on business, or returning to join their families. Only 14 gave the riot as a cause for their leaving the city.<sup>172</sup>

It is reported, moreover, that the South, still feeling the effects of migration in the form of a serious labor shortage in its main industries, has been trying to induce the Negroes to return. As a means of accomplishing this it resorted to a scheme of using certain newspapers in the North to make persuasive appeals to the Negroes. In these the South's needs were made known, its kind treatment of Negroes was extolled, its opportunities were enumerated, and its growing change of heart on the question of race relations was affirmed. After rumor went broadcast that after the Washington and Chicago riots the Negroes, in terror, were leaving the North, moreover, more positive efforts were made, especially on the part of two Southern States, to obtain Negro laborers. These took the form of sending agents to the North to solicit labor and of empowering them to offer the Negroes free transportation and to make them promises of increased wages and better living conditions. These inducements, however, were ineffective

<sup>172</sup> Hill, T. A., *Survey*, 43: 183-85, Nov. 29, 1919.

because the Negroes doubted the sincerity of the Southern agents. Indeed, they were inclined all the more to be skeptical, for in the meantime news had reached them from various parts of the South to the effect that, except school conditions, things have not at all changed for the better; that, in many instances on the contrary, since the Great War living conditions of Negroes have become worse and that from a few places a small stream of Negroes was still moving northward.<sup>173</sup> The Federal census of 1920 justifies us, furthermore, in saying that for the most part the Negro migrants are satisfied with conditions in the North and are inclined to remain there; and that the number of those returning or who have returned to the South is, in comparison to the great number of those who came North, infinitely small.

<sup>173</sup> Hill, T. A., *Survey*, 43: 183-85, Nov. 29, 1919.